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THREE FRENCH GOTHIC TAPESTRIES HITHERTO
KNOWN AS THE "BAILLÉE DES ROSES"

[PLATE VI]

INCLUDED in the collection of tapestries in the Metropolitan Museum are three of unusual interest and beauty, well known to collectors and scholars and even to the general public. They have been reproduced many a time, they have been discussed and described in many books and periodicals, and in each publication looked upon as being among the most important specimens tapestry weaving has ever produced. Considering the vast amount of curiosity aroused by these tapestries and the place they already occupy in literature it would seem that nothing could be added to their history. This, however, is not the case, and if I take the opportunity to discuss them again in these pages it is simply because I desire to call attention to some historical facts which will throw a new light on their meaning and abolish the name "Baillée des Roses" by which they are now generally known in America. It seems essential first to pass in review the most important opinions expressed concerning them since the day they became known to the public.

It was at the exhibition of the French Primitives in Paris in 1904 that they first aroused universal admiration and recognition. They then belonged to the collection of M. Sigismund Bardac and were lent by him to the Louvre where among many masterpieces they retained their place of honor. Henri Bouchot, the noted French authority on the subject, devoted to them a careful study and was the first to detect their close relationship to the works of Fouquet. In fact he even gives an undeniable proof of this relationship in associating them with Fouquet's famous miniature which represents the court trial of the Duke of Alençon, presided over by Charles VII himself.¹ Later in the discussion we shall have occasion to return to this miniature. Bouchot, however, merely pointed out the likeness and went no further;

¹ Henri Bouchot, *Exposition des Primitifs Français*, Paris, 1904, pl. XXIX.

he did not mention the significance of the background represented and did not arrive at any definite conclusion concerning the tapestries themselves. Other French critics writing at about the same time and even later were less explicit. Among them is Georges Lafenêtre who treats the subject in his article in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*¹ and again in his book on French Primitives.² All he tries to do is to bring out the artistic qualities displayed in these tapestries. Jules Guiffrey, one of the writers best informed on the subject of tapestries, classes them in the series of the "Conversations Galantes" and considers that their principal interest consists in the exact information they give us on the costumes of the time. He makes no attempt to interpret the background but merely criticises the strangeness of the vertical lines, adding: "Nos tapisseries ne reculaient devant aucune audace."³ I shall come back to this particular background and explain its real meaning, as it forms the principal object of this study.

When in 1909 The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired the tapestries in question, there appeared in the *Bulletin*⁴ an article about them discussing at length their subject and artistic value. Among other comments the *Bulletin* says:

"The hangings picture for us an interesting custom of the period of Charles VII, when Agnès Sorel was in favor, a custom described by Larousse in the *Grand dictionnaire universel* as follows: 'The *Baillée des roses* was an *hommage* which the peers of France owed until about the end of the sixteenth century to the Parlement and consisted in themselves presenting roses in April, May, and June when they called the roll. Foreign princes, cardinals, princes of the blood, children of France whose peerages are found in the jurisdiction of the Parlement owed this *hommage*. This is the manner in which it was rendered: they chose a day when there was an audience in the great chamber and the peer who was presenting the *baillée* had all the chambers of the Parlement hung with flowers and sweet smelling herbs before the audience. He gave a splendid breakfast to the presidents, councillors, clerks and henchmen of the court, then he came into each chamber, having borne before him a great silver basin filled

¹ *Gaz. B.-A.* XXXI, 1904, pp. 461-462.

² Georges Lafenêtre, *L'exposition des Primitifs Français*, 1904, p. 24.

³ Jules Guiffrey, *Les tapisseries du XII^e à la fin du XVI^e siècle*, p. 73.

⁴ *B. Metr. Mus.*, September, 1909.



FIGURE 1.—FRENCH GOTHIC TAPESTRY: METROPOLITAN MUSEUM.

not only with bouquets of pinks, roses, and other flowers, either natural or made of silk, as many as there were officers, but also with as many crowns enhanced with his arms. After this *homage* he held audience in the great chamber, then the mass was said, the hautboys played and continued to play before the presi-

dent during dinner. There was no subaltern officer down to him who wrote the register who did not receive his due of roses. The origin of this custom is unknown, but it existed not only at the Parlement of Paris but also at all the other Parlements of the kingdom, especially that of Toulouse.'"

Before entering into any discussion concerning the paragraph cited above it is interesting to note that there appeared simultaneously two publications in New York, reproducing with some enlargements and comments the account in the Metropolitan Museum *Bulletin* which, as we shall see, has no relation to the subject of the tapestries.

Mr. George Leland Hunter in his book on tapestries reproduces the hangings in question.¹ After explaining the custom of the Baillée des Roses he adds: "The tapestries before us picture this Baillée des Roses most quaintly. On wide vertical bands of green, white, and red, strewn with rose foliage and flowers, appear ladies and gentlemen in XV century costumes of great variety and interest."

Another writer, Helen Churchill Candee, says:² "The tapestries represent a custom of France in the time when Charles VII . . . had as his favourite the fascinating Agnes Sorel. During the late spring when roses of France are in fullest flower, various peers of France had as political duty to present to each member of the Parlement a rose when the members answered in response to roll call. The greatest chamber where the body met was for the occasion transformed into a bower; vines and sprays of roses covered all the grim walls, as the straying vines in the tapestry reveal. . . . Our tapestries show the figures of ladies and gentlemen present at this pretty ceremony."

I do not know what were the sources upon which Mrs. Candee based her conclusions that "vines and sprays of roses covered all the grim walls, as the straying vines in the tapestry reveal," or that "our tapestries show the figures of ladies and gentlemen present at this pretty ceremony." Probably these are her own deductions. It is interesting to notice that both Mrs. Candee and Mr. Hunter seem to have accepted the explanation of the subject given in the *Bulletin* of the Metropolitan Museum without any critical examination as to its validity. Be-

¹ George Leland Hunter, *Tapestries, their Origin, History and Renaissance*, 1912, p. 376.

² Helen Churchill Candee, *The Tapestry Book*, 1912, p. 42.

fore them the Metropolitan Museum received the short statement accompanying the tapestries when they came from Paris, without questioning it, although in none of the criticisms which appeared in Paris was the custom of Baillée des Roses mentioned in connection with these hangings. It is true that none of the French



FIGURE 2.—FRENCH GOTHIC TAPESTRY: METROPOLITAN MUSEUM.

writers brought out the real meaning of the background of the tapestries which, as we shall see, adds much to an understanding of them, but these writers, if they contributed little to the interpretation of the background, at least did not commit the error of imputing to the tapestries a meaning they never had.

In the first place it must be noted that the *Baillée des Roses* has no special connection with the time of Charles VII. According to both Larousse's *Grand dictionnaire universel* and the *Grande Encyclopédie* it was an homage which, until about the end of the sixteenth century, the peers of France owed to the *Parlement*, and A. Chérue! in his *Dictionnaire historique des institutions . . . de la France*¹ speaks of it as one of the feudal dues: "The Peers of France offered roses to the Parlement of Paris in April, May, and June. The Parlement which represented the King, received this homage as sign of its suzerainty." It is probable that the *Baillée des Roses* became a custom when the *Parlement* of Paris was independently and definitely constituted, which occurred about 1328, although it may already have been known before that time.

In the next place this feudal ceremony has nothing to do with the tapestries themselves. What they represent is not the custom of the *Parlements* of France known as the *Baillée des Roses* but simply ladies and gentlemen of the court displayed against a background which shows the personal emblems of Charles VII.

We know that the colors of Charles VII were red, white, and green. In the "Comptes de L'Argenterie du Roi" we read a convincing proof of this: ". . . Pour une ceinture de broderie faite de fil d'or de Fleurance et de Soye Rouge, Blanche et Vert, en manière d'une terrasse de laquelle sault (s'élève) une fleur de Marguerite pour servir à mettre autour d'un chaperon couvert de velours gris"; and ". . . à Monseigneur Charles fils du Roi pour une chaisne d'or faite à chaînon d'or esmaillé aux couleurs et devises du Roy, c'est à savoir Rouge, Blanc et Vert. . . ." ²

As for the rose-bush, it also was a personal emblem of Charles VII. We learn this from records of the time and we see the rose bush on medals of his reign. An account of royal New Year gifts in 1454 reads: ". . . À Gilbert Jehan, orfèvre du roi, notre sire, pour quatre marcs, trois gros et vingt karats, mis et employiez en menues estrennes d'or faictes en façon d'un rosier, lesquelles le dit seigneur a données, audit premier jour de l'an à plusieurs de ses officiers. . . ." ³ In another account of 1458 we read: "Pour

¹ A. Chérue!, *Dictionnaire historique des institutions . . . de la France*, 1884, s. v., *Redevances féodales*.

² Auguste Jal, *Dictionnaire critique de biographie et d'histoire*, 1867, p. 437.

³ Vallet de Viriville, 'Médaille frappée à la monnaie sous Charles VII en souvenir de l'expulsion des Anglais en 1451 et années suivantes,' *Annuaire de la Société française de numismatique*, 1867, p. 224.

18 aulnes de drap vert et 6 aulnes $\frac{3}{4}$ de fin blanchet qui est de l'un et de l'autre 24 aulnes $\frac{3}{4}$, delivré à Jean Cochet, brodeur et varlet de chambre du roy, pour faire tailler et asseoir à bordeure, sur chacune des manches desdites robes, un escot à branches garnies de feuilles de rosier, à la devise accoutumée du roy, notre sire, (pour les robes distribuées à 99 menus officiers de l'hôtel). . . ."¹ On medals made to commemorate the expulsion of the English from France we see the emblem of the rose-bush repeated several times.²

In addition to these convincing facts there is also the one pointed out by Bouchot, in regard to Fouquet's miniature, mentioned above. It is interesting to recall in a few words the history of this painting. In 1458 the Vicar of Haubervilliers near St. Denis finished for Étienne Chevalier, treasurer of Charles VII, the philosophical dissertation, "Le cas des nobles malheureux," by Boccaccio. Jean Fouquet was engaged to illuminate it. At this time the famous trial of Jean duc d'Alençon, was taking place in the Château de St. Georges in Vendôme.³ Fouquet had the ingenious idea of using a representation of this for a frontispiece. He shows us the Hall of the Bed of Justice where the trial occurs. Charles VII presides. The hangings of the hall have a background identical with the one in the Museum tapestries. The colors of the King, red, white, and green, are alternately repeated and his emblem, the rose-bush, is strewn on this surface. Instead, however, of the ladies and gentlemen seen in our tapestries, there are on each side the arms of France supported by two white stags with golden crowns around their necks.⁴

The miniature was made in 1458. Our tapestries were probably made a few years earlier, before the middle of the fifteenth century. The same background with the personal colors and emblem of Charles VII occurs in both. Evidently both sets of tapestries were made by order of the King, and quite possibly the

¹ Vallet de Viriville, 'Médaille frappée à la monnaie sous Charles VII en souvenir de l'expulsion des Anglais en 1451 et années suivantes,' *Annuaire de la Société française de numismatique*, p. 225, note 1, and Jal, *op. cit.* p. 492.

² *Annuaire de la Société française de numismatique*, 1867, pl. XII, fig. 1A; p. 215, pl. XIII, no. 2A; p. 216, pl. XIV, nos. 3 and 4; pl. XV, no. 6A; pl. XVI, no. 8B. See also F. Mazzerolle, *Les médailleurs français du XV au milieu du XVII siècle*, III, pl. I; and *Trésor de numismatique et de glyptique*, XIV, pl. II.

³ See concerning this trial: Curmer, *Oeuvre de Jean Fouquet*, II, p. 1, and Viriville in *Annuaire de la Société française de numismatique*, 1867, p. 225, note 1.

⁴ See for the explanation of the white stags: Curmer, *op. cit.* II, p. 7. The frontispiece is reproduced in the same book.

ones in the Museum for his favorite Agnès Sorel. This supposition is rendered plausible, first, by the background and, second, by the great resemblance of the lady in one of the tapestries (Plate VI) to the Virgin of Melun in the Antwerp Museum. This Virgin, as we know, was painted by Fouquet and is supposed to represent Agnès Sorel. These coincidences point to Fouquet as the designer of the cartoons for our tapestries. A close examination of the types represented seems to confirm this supposition for we see indeed a great similarity between them and the figures in several works of Fouquet, *e.g.*, in the Book of Hours of Étienne Chevalier and in the frontispiece before mentioned. Bouchot, as we have already pointed out, noticed in these tapestries a likeness to Fouquet's work, but thought the drawing inferior to his. However, as he himself says, "Might not this be the fault of the weavers?" With the explanation here given of the background I have additional evidence that the tapestries were made after Fouquet and that they were most probably ordered by Charles VII for Agnès Sorel.

Though I have emphasized their historical value, which is clearly of great importance, their artistic qualities are none the less remarkable. They are of the best period of French weaving when the Gothic decorative qualities were at their height. They belong to a series known as "Conversations Galantes" and are probably fragments of a greater ensemble. Backgrounds composed of long three-colored stripes strewn with flowers are known to have been represented in other tapestries of the fifteenth century. Among them were tapestries with the arms of Charles de Bourbon, as is shown by a drawing in the Portfolio de Gaignières.¹ These tapestries, however, showed the colors sometimes adopted by members of the royal family which were red, white, and blue,² instead of the personal colors of Charles VII which were red, white, and green. Several miniatures of the fifteenth century also show similarly decorated backgrounds.³ Later, as we know, the long multicolored stripes disappear and they are replaced by a uniform dark background strewn with

¹ *R. Art Anc. Mod.* 1913, p. 13. Article by Bertaux on the exhibition in the Hôtel Sagan in 1913.

² See Jal, *op. cit.* p. 437: "Couleurs du duc de Berry, dauphin de Viennois, régent du royaume (1419). Le duc de Berry portait les 3 couleurs qui composent aujourd'hui le Pavillon français, le Bleu, le Blanc et le Rouge."

³ See the *Chronicles of England, France, Spain . . .* by Sir John Froissart. Translation by Thomas Johnes. Vol. II, pp. 495, 602, 699.

various flowers and leaf-work, diversified by little birds and animals.

The costumes themselves are of the greatest interest. They are minutely and exactly portrayed. In a great number of other tapestries of the time with which it is interesting to compare our hangings, we can admire the same exactness. Those of the Berne Museum are the most important.¹ Nowhere, however, is there more charm and freshness than in the hangings we are reproducing, especially in the lady presumably representing Charles VII's favorite, the beautiful Agnès Sorel.

STELLA RUBINSTEIN.

NEW YORK, N. Y.

¹ Jubinal. *Les anciennes tapisseries historiées*, vol. II. Compare particularly pls. IV, VIII, and X.



FRENCH GOTHIC TAPESTRY: METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK.